

STATE HISTORICAL
SOCIETY OF IOWA

IOWA DEPARTMENT OF CULTURAL AFFAIRS

The Annals of Iowa

Volume 49 | Number 5 (Summer 1988)

pps. 418-420

The Presidency of Herbert C. Hoover

ISSN 0003-4827

No known copyright restrictions.

Recommended Citation

"The Presidency of Herbert C. Hoover." *The Annals of Iowa* 49 (1988), 418-420.

Available at: <https://doi.org/10.17077/0003-4827.9288>

Hosted by [Iowa Research Online](#)

riculture (*Red Harvest*, 1982), but he is more cautious and provides little analysis concerning the party's lack of appeal.

The party's honeymoon with reform elements in the United States ended with the Nazi-Soviet non-aggression pact of August 1939. Klehr expertly relates the shock of this bombshell which caught American Communists as unaware as their European counterparts. The ideological switch back to the concepts of the Third Period minimized the differences between the bourgeois democracies and fascism and left no doubt that the party's policies were dictated from the Soviet Union. Klehr concludes that the costs were serious and permanent: a substantial decline in membership, the emergence of new enemies, and the depletion of hard-won goodwill were among the consequences. Popular Front organizations were devastated. Not even a return to the Popular Front position after the Nazi attack on the Soviet Union in June 1941 could undo the damage.

Klehr's book skillfully portrays the failure of the CPUSA during the depression decade—a period when, he points out, the party should have succeeded. For during this period there was less hostility towards the Soviet Union and less government repression of radicals. During the Popular Front era, Communists and progressive forces often occupied a common ground in the struggle against depression at home and fascist aggression abroad. Overall, "The Heyday of American Communism" was in Klehr's view not much of a heyday, although the party did reach the pinnacle of its influence. The party's domination by Soviet policy and the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact relegated it to a shadowy background in American political life.

Those interested in the Communist Party in the United States may want to consult Theodore Draper's *The Roots of American Communism* (New York, 1957), which covers the 1920s and whose theme is similar to Klehr's, or a more comprehensive but less original history, *The American Communist Party: A Critical History* (New York, 1962), by Irving Howe and Lewis Coser. Klehr's well-documented work may upset some whose perspectives are farther left, but for the time being it is the most authoritative study of the CPUSA during the 1930s.

BUENA VISTA COLLEGE

WILLIAM H. CUMBERLAND

The Presidency of Herbert C. Hoover, by Martin L. Fausold. American Presidency Series 14. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1985. xii, 288 pp. Notes, bibliographical essay, index. \$22.50 cloth.

The Presidency of Herbert C. Hoover is the fourteenth volume in a series on the American presidency published by the University Press of Kan-

sas. The purpose of the series is to provide both historians and the general reading public with interpretive yet comprehensive surveys, based on the best pertinent secondary literature, which cover "the broad ground between biographies, specialized monographs, and journalistic accounts" (ix). Given the relative brevity of each volume and the complexity of the Hoover years, this is no easy task. Nonetheless, Professor Fausold has given us a valuable account of Hoover's one term in the White House. In keeping with the intent of the series, he makes no attempt to carry the story into the long postpresidential years.

Hoover's philosophy of ordered freedom is the key, Fausold argues, to understanding his careers as humanitarian, secretary of commerce, and president. That philosophy evolved in part from his Quaker religious background and in part from the secular reinforcement given those Quaker tenets by his varied professional and public experiences. As a "secular Quaker" Hoover was not the advocate of either laissez faire economics or Social Darwinism as his critics at times suggested. His philosophy instead called for the positive, active use of government to stimulate and coordinate private associations in building the institutions of a more rational, more orderly society. The federal government played a crucial role in this process as it would balance the competing needs of capital, labor, and agriculture to safeguard and encourage individual initiative and equality of opportunity. Ideologically, Fausold tells us, "the more Hoover's life changed, the more it seemed to stay the same" (1). As president, Hoover was a reform-oriented activist whose vigorous anticyclical measures to combat the depression were unprecedented and "uncanny." In this sense Fausold sees Hoover as the first of the "new presidents." He was more flexible than his advisers and more innovative than many of his critics. This same vigor was evident in diplomacy, where Hoover proved to be a strong president who made his own foreign policy.

Fausold seeks to offer a balanced interpretation of Hoover's strengths and weaknesses while at the same time correcting some of the old stereotypes that have persisted for over fifty years. He finds much to praise in Hoover as a public servant. At the same time he highlights those defects he believes explain why Hoover's presidency was a "failed one" (245). Most of those defects were those of a man almost totally unsuited by temperament and personality for the inspired political leadership required during the baffling economic collapse. Trying to be a "largely nonpartisan" president (48), Hoover too often allowed Congress to ignore or scorn his recommendations, adopted an administrative style and work load that isolated him from his own party members, created an increasing number of political enemies by interpreting political differences in a highly personal manner, and failed to

appreciate the importance of creating personal rapport with the American people. As the depression worsened, some of his philosophical convictions hardened into dogmas, especially, for example, his prolonged emphasis on voluntarism in providing for the needy, so that in this and other respects he was also the last of the "old presidents."

Given the nature of the series and the constraints of space, it is not surprising to find some gaps and some unanswered questions in this study. As scholars are still in the investigative stage of an analysis of this complex man and his even more complex era, a great deal of research and a host of questions still need to be addressed or probed in greater depth before final verdicts can be offered with confidence. Meanwhile, Fausold's synthesis is the most judicious and the best available scholarly survey of the Hoover presidency.

COE COLLEGE

DONALD J. LISIO

Dirksen of Illinois: Senatorial Statesman, by Edward L. Schapsmeier and Frederick H. Schapsmeier. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1985. xvi, 269 pp. Photographs, notes, bibliography, index. \$19.95 cloth.

The public life of Everett Dirksen began with his successful election to the U.S. Congress in 1932, continued with his election as U.S. Senator in 1950, and ended with his death in August 1969. To describe and evaluate thirty-six years of public life is difficult enough; to discuss a political figure whose career spanned the Great Depression, World War II, the Cold War and McCarthyism, the New Frontier and Great Society, and, finally, the Vietnam War in one slim volume is a near impossibility. The Schapsmeiers meet this challenge by assuming a basic knowledge of contemporary world events on the part of the reader. This allows them to concentrate exclusively on Dirksen's life and career with a minimal amount of explanatory information. In addition, the bulk of the book quite rightly concentrates on Dirksen's senatorial career in the years after 1950.

Midwesterners themselves, the authors bring sensitivity and insight to "Ev" Dirksen's early years in Pekin, Illinois. Shunning psychobiography for straightforward narrative, the authors nevertheless provide valuable information about the man who, half a century later, forced Kennedy and Johnson, two media-wise presidents, to share center stage. Readers learn about the stable if narrow world of the rural Midwest in the first decade of the twentieth century, the widening horizons provided by the Western Front in World War I, and even more important, the thespian achievements of the otherwise shy

Copyright of Annals of Iowa is the property of State of Iowa, by & through the State Historical Society of Iowa and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.